

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

In Opposition to L.D. 307

**LD TITLE: An Act To Exempt Persons Who Have Served In The
Armed Forces From The Requirement To Take A Hunter Safety
Course To Obtain A Hunting License**

SPONSORED BY: Representative DAVIS of Sangerville

**CO-SPONSORED BY: Representative GUERIN of Glenburn, Senator
THIBODEAU of Waldo and Representatives: BLACK of Wilton,
AYOTTE of Caswell, CRAFTS of Lisbon, FREDETTE of Newport,
GIFFORD of Lincoln, LONG of Sherman, WILSON of Augusta,
WOOD of Sabattus**

DATE OF HEARING: March 21, 2013

Good afternoon Senator Dutremble, Representative Shaw, and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife committee. I am Michael Sawyer, Supervisor of the Recreational Safety Unit at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking in opposition to L. D. 307.

This bill exempts persons who have received training in the armed forces, including both persons on active duty and veterans, from having to take a hunter safety course to obtain a hunting license.

In the 1950's Maine experienced two hunting seasons where 19 fatalities occurred in each. Through 1970 there were many seasons where 50 or more hunting incidents were reported to the department. Law changes in the 1970's began to address these high incident rates and included making deer drives and hunting from a paved way illegal, changing legal hunting hours to sunset and requiring hunter orange during firearms season on deer. With these changes came a reduction in hunting incidents. Still through 1980 there continued to be 3 to 4 fatalities and 30 to 40 incidents per a year.

In 1971 the federal Pitman Robertson Act was amended to include funding for the states to begin hunter education efforts. The department began a hunter education program that

hunters could take voluntarily. The course became mandatory in Maine in 1986 due to the hunting incidents that were still occurring.

Within a few years after the course began the average number of incidents was reduced. In recent years, laws have changed to adjust hunter orange requirements and to allow hunting to continue past sunset. This has not caused a noticeable increase in injuries but hunter education is still mandatory. This year more than 250,000 hunters will have graduated since the inception of the hunter education course in Maine. As the percentage of hunters afield who have completed training in this state grows, we have been able to enjoy many years without any fatalities and have averaged less than 10 incidents per season. Other states with similar mandatory education courses have seen the same positive trend.

Our program follows a set of standards that were adopted in the 1990's by the members of the International Association of Hunter Education Administrators. These standards are recognized as a basis for reciprocity for other states, provinces and countries. They are also used as a baseline for program funding by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. A copy of those standards will be provided during the work session for your reference. I would like you to know that in many areas, a student must be present at a class to demonstrate the objectives for safe firearms handling. In addition our Maine course requires training sections on survival, map & compass, landowner relations, laws, and other items that are state specific.

Landowners, hunters, and the non- hunting public have come to expect that today's new hunters will be a graduate of a program that meets these standards and includes state specific training. Although many people may receive training in firearms use through other venues, one has to ask; does that venue meet or exceed these standards or are they trained with the same purpose in mind? If exceptions are granted to one group, will others come forth asking for similar considerations?

We certainly recognize the commitment and sacrifice that members of our armed forces have given and want to ensure you that we have considered this in coming to our position on this bill. We recognize that they have firearms training at various levels but whereas this training may vary widely and may not speak to the standards we operate under, we believe it is in the best interest of the sport of hunting, for all participants to graduate from an approved curriculum that we have had in place for more than 25 years.

I would be glad to answer any questions.